

October 1998

**Fact Sheet****Conservation Reserve Program****18th Sign-Up Period****October 26 - December 11, 1998****Background**

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program that offers annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term resource-conserving covers on eligible land.

Annual rental payments are made based on the agriculture rental value of the land and cost-share assistance is provided in an amount equal to not more than 50 percent of the participant's costs in establishing approved practices.

The duration of contracts is from 10 to 15 years.

Sign-up 18 of the CRP will be held for a 7-week period beginning October 26 and ending December 11, 1998. This is the third general CRP sign-up since enactment of the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996.

Eligibility

To be eligible to be placed in CRP, land must be:

1. Cropland that has been planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity 2 of the 5 crop years from 1994 to 1998 that is also physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity; or

2. Marginal pasture land that is either:

- Certain acreage enrolled in the Water Bank Program; or
- Suitable for use as a riparian buffer to be planted to trees.

In addition to basic cropland eligibility requirements, at least one of the following conditions must be met. Land must:

1. Be considered highly erodible land according to the conservation compliance provision or, if a portion of a field, have a weighted average Erosion Index of 8 or higher;
2. Be considered a cropped wetland;
3. Be subject to scour erosion;
4. Be located in a national or State CRP conservation priority area; or,
5. Be cropland associated with non-cropped wetlands.

Ranking Criteria

Under Sign-up 18, all offers will continue to be evaluated and ranked using an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) based on the environmental benefits expected to accrue if the land is enrolled in the CRP.

The Sign-up 18 EBI is very similar to the EBI for Sign-up 16. Contract size has been eliminated as a subfactor of the wildlife component, and points have been added for wildlife food plots and wetland restoration. In certain States, water quality area designations have been modified, and a few additional conservation priority areas may have been approved.

Use of the EBI ensures that only the most environmentally sensitive lands are selected and that all offers are considered fairly and equitably.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service collects data for each of the EBI factors based upon the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Offers are then ranked in comparison to all other offers, and selections made from that ranking.

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EBI factors are:

- Wildlife habitat benefits;
- Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff, and leaching;
- On-farm benefits of reduced erosion;
- Enduring benefits;
- Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion;
- Benefits of enrollment in conservation priority areas where enrollment would contribute to the improvement of identified adverse water quality, wildlife habitat, or air quality; and
- Cost.

Payment Rates

Maximum CRP payments will be determined based on the average of the past 3 years of local dryland cash or cash rent equivalent rental rates adjusted for site-specific, soil-based productivity factors. CRP payments can include an additional amount, not to exceed \$5 an acre a year, as an incentive to perform certain maintenance obligations.

The maximum CRP payment rate for each offer is calculated in advance of enrollment. Producers may offer land at that rate or may offer a lower rental rate to increase the likelihood that their offer will be acceptable.

Producer Eligibility Requirements

An applicant must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to close of the sign-up period *unless*:

- The new owner acquired the land as a result of death of the previous owner;
- The only ownership change occurred due to foreclosure where the owner exercised a timely right of redemption in accordance with State law; or
- The circumstances of the acquisition provide adequate assurance to the Farm Service Agency that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

Producers should contact their local USDA Service Center for more information.

When and Where

The sign-up period begins Monday, October 26, 1998, and runs through Friday, December 11, 1998.

Offers are accepted only during that period at the local offices of the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA). These are usually listed in local telephone directories under "United States Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture."

What will the EBI cutoff be for Sign-up 18?

Decisions on the EBI cutoff will be made after Sign-up 18 is concluded. CRP is a highly competitive program. Landowners who have met previous EBI thresholds are not guaranteed a contract under this sign-up.

NOTE: The sign-up period does not apply to participation in certain high-priority environmental practices such as filter strips, riparian buffers, etc. (For more details, see FSA Farm Program Fact Sheet: Conservation Reserve Program - Continuous Sign-Up for High-Priority Practices.)

How can I make my CRP offer more competitive?

The demand to enroll land in CRP is much greater than the amount that can be accepted (CRP enrollment authority is 36.4 million acres and there are over 350 million acres of U.S. cropland).

To be more competitive, consider only offering the most environmentally sensitive land, enhancing covers for the benefit of wildlife, and accepting a lower payment rate than the maximum amount FSA is willing to offer.

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To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., 20250, or call 1 800-245-6340 (voice) or (202) 720-1127 (TDD).

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